Ethnic Differences in Parental Warmth and Control: Distinctions among and between Mothers and Fathers of Young Children

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**BACKGROUND**

- Parenting goals and values often differ by culture, as do specific parenting practices.
- Cultural differences in parenting practices have been suggested in various research studies, both internationally and within the U.S. context.
- The present study examines ethnic variation in parental warmth and control within the increasingly diverse U.S. context without using European American as a basis of comparison.
- Ethnicity is addressed on the couple level (i.e., the paired ethnicity of the parental couple jointly) to permit analysis at a family systems level.

**METHODS (Continued)**

**MEASURES**

Parental Warmth
1. Expression of affection in physical ways (e.g., hugging, kissing)
2. General disposition (easygoing and relaxed) when interacting with their child
3. Not at all like you to 5 = exactly like you

Items summed, possible total from 1-10

**DISCUSSION**

**RESULTS**

RQ1:

- Fathers from Asian American couples reported lower warmth than other ethnicities
- Mothers from Latino couples endorsed general discipline more than other ethnicities
- Fathers from European American couples and Interethnic couples were higher in endorsement of general discipline than other ethnicities
- Mothers from African American couples were higher in endorsement of harsh discipline than other ethnicities; mothers from Latino couples were lower in endorsement than other ethnicities
- Similar findings in endorsement of harsh discipline for fathers (African American highest, Latino lowest)

RQ2:

- Mothers higher in warmth than fathers, all couple types
- Mothers higher than fathers in endorsement of general discipline among Latino couples and Asian American couples
- Mothers higher than fathers in endorsement of harsh discipline among African American, Asian American, and Latino couples
- Fathers higher than mothers in endorsement of harsh discipline among European American couples

**DISCUSSION**

- Maternal warmth high across cultures (consistent gender norms)
- Gender differences in general discipline may reflect traditional gender norms; however, other contextual factors may be important (e.g., time spent with children)
- Intervention efforts may be warranted to address lower warmth among Asian American parents and higher harsh discipline among African American parents; however, ethnic differences may be adaptive for parents faced with social stressors
- Results can be used to foster understanding of cultural differences and encourage cultural sensitivity

**METHODS**

Sample
- Secondary analysis of data from the third wave (preschool wave) of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B)
- All couples lived together during third wave
- Couple types:
  - European American (n = 2650)
  - African American (n = 300)
  - Latino (n = 700)
  - Asian American (n = 700)
  - Interethnic (n = 850)

Total: n = 5,200

Participants
- Mothers $M_{\text{age}} = 33.82$ (SD = 5.78)
- Fathers $M_{\text{age}} = 36.36$ (SD = 6.64)
- 92% of couples married
- Median educational attainment: some college/2 yr degrees
- Annual household income: $M = $40,001 - $50k, Median = $50,001 - $75k
- Number of children: $M = 2.52$(SD = 1.09), Mode=2

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